

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: PDEV, PINT, GR

SUBJECT: THE EVROS PROTESTS AGAIN

REF: A) 76 THESSALONIKI 017, B) 76 ATHENS A-147

1. SUMMARY: THE NOMOS OF EVROS, THE AREA BORDERING ON TURKEY IN EASTERN THRACE, IS AGAIN PROTESTING NEGLECT BY ATHENS IN TERMS OF INVESTMENT INCENTIVES AND THE PLACEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS. AS WITH 1976 PROTEST (REF A), LEADERS ARE NON-RADICAL, MIDDLE-CLASS LEADERS OF COMMUNITY. DIFFERENCE THIS TIME IS THAT PROTEST IS LARGER AND CENTERED IN NOMOS CAPITAL, ALEXANDROUPOLIS. THE PROTEST COMMITTEE LED BY THE LOCAL METROPOLITAN, AND THE MAYOR AND MANY OTHER ELECTED OFFICIALS OF ALEXANDROUPOLIS ARE PARTICIPATING COMPLETELY AND HAVE EMPHASIZED THEIR DISCONTENT BY RESIGNING. END SUMMARY.

2. PROTEST TRIGGERED BY GOG ANNOUNCEMENT IN ATHENS OF NEW HEALTH MEASURES THROUGHOUT GREECE WHICH INCLUDED ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIVERSITY CLINIC IN ALEXANDROUPOLIS. LOCAL ELECTED

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OFFICIALS WHO HAD ANTICIPATED THAT UNIVERSITY OF THRACE MEDICAL SCHOOL WOULD BE ESTABLISHED IN ALEXANDROUPOLIS PROTESTED AND USED OCCASION TO INCLUDE COMPLAINTS THAT ECONOMIC INCENTIVES LAW (LAW 289/76, REF B) IS NOT WORKING IN EVROS. A FOUR DAY GENERAL STRIKE WAS CALLED, MARCH 17-21, AS PART OF PROTEST.

3. MINISTER OF EDUCATION RALLIS RESPONDED TO PROTESTERS' COMPLAINTS WITH EXPLANATION THAT ONLY UNIVERSITY CLINICS WILL BE ESTABLISHED NOW IN THRACE, AND ANSWERED CHARGES OF ECONOMIC NEGLECT WITH A MASS OF FINANCIAL STATISTICS TO DEMONSTRATE GOG'S EFFORTS TO HELP EVROS. RALLIS CONCLUDED THAT, BASED ON THESE FIGURES, PROTESTS WERE "INCONCEIVABLE" AND THAT "ON THE CONTRARY, PEOPLE OF EVROS SHOULD HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR APPRECIATION TO GOVERNMENT".

4. TWELVE THOUSAND PEOPLE JOINED PROTEST MARCH NEXT DAY IN WHAT PRESS DESCRIBED AS LARGEST PUBLIC GATHERING SINCE ALEXANDROUPOLIS' INDEPENDENCE. MEETING APPROVED RESOLUTION DEMANDING ESTABLISHMENT OF MEDICAL SCHOOL IN ALEXANDROUPOLIS AND SPECIAL ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC INCENTIVES FOR THE EVROS AREA UNDER LAW 289/76. ONE OTHER INTERESTING DEMAND WAS FOR THE OPENING OF BORDER WITH BULGARIA TO INCREASE TRADE AND TOURISM (ONLY CROSSING POINT NOW IS AT KOULA IN MACEDONIA).

5. POST-MORTEMS ON PROTEST INDICATE THAT PROTEST LEADERS ARE PLEASED WITH THEIR EFFORTS WHICH THEY ARE CALLING "FIRST PHASE OF OUR WARNING MOBILIZATION." A COORDINATING COMMITTEE FROM ALL THE EVROS WILL NOW BE ELECTED TO DEVELOP A SECOND PHASE AND A PUBLIC MEETING HAS BEEN CALLED FOR MARCH 30 IN ALEXANDROUPOLIS TO INFORM PEOPLE OF FUTURE PLANS. IN MEANTIME, DELEGATION COMPOSED OF THE METROPOLITAN, VARIOUS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEPUTIES AND THE NOMARCH OF EVROS HAS GONE TO ATHENS TO MEET WITH RALLIS OVER MEDICAL SCHOOL.

6. ALLEGED SLOW ECONOMIC GROWTH IN EVROS CAUSED BY FAILURE OF LAW 289/76 TO PROMOTE INVESTMENT IN BORDER REGION IS UNDERLYING REASON FOR DISCONTENT. ARGUMENT IS THAT WHILE ECONOMIC INCENTIVES HAVE PROMPTED SOME INVESTMENT IN THRACE, THIS HAS BEEN CONCENTRATED IN MORE DEVELOPED WESTERN THRACE. FOR EXAMPLE, PROTEST COMMITTEE POINTED OUT THAT, OF THE 1.5 BILLION DRACHMAE IN NEW INVESTMENTS FOR THRACE ANNOUNCED MARCH 18 BY GOG IN ATHENS, XANTHI AREA OF WESTERN THRACE WITH 25 PERCENT OF POPULATION RECEIVED 54 PERCENT OF TOTAL, KOMOTINI AREA IN WEST/CENTRAL THRACE WITH 31 PERCENT OF POPULATION RECEIVED 21 PERCENT, AND EVROS WITH 44 PERCENT OF POPULATION RECEIVED 25 PERCENT.

7. THIS PROTEST MAY PASS AS DID EARLIER ONE, EVEN THOUGH IT IS CONSIDERABLY MORE WIDESPREAD.

PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT IS INVOLVEMENT OF
ALEXANDROUPOLIS' JUST RESIGNED MAYOR, LOUKAS
NICOLAIDES, AN ASTUTE POLITICAL PRO WHO WAS
FORMERLY A CU DEPUTY (1963-64) AND WHO WAS
OVERWHELMINGLY ELECTED MAYOR ON EDEK TICKET IN
1975 ELECTIONS. NICOLAIDES ENJOYS GREAT POPULARITY
IN EVROS AND HE IS UNLIKELY, AS PROFESSIONAL POLITICIAN,
TO HAVE RESIGNED WITHOUT SOME STRONG EXPECTATION THAT
PROTESTS WILL RESULT IN SATISFACTION OF AT LEAST PART
OF THE PROTESTERS' DEMANDS WHICH WOULD PERMIT HIS OWN
GRACEFUL RESUMPTION OF OFFICE. NEGROPONTE

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